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The Man Behind Nikola Tesla Inventions

" Tesla presents an interesting study of the way in which a man's personality may both generate his intellectual achievements and set a limit to them," as described by Reginald Kapp. Tesla is an optimal example for researchers to not only consider his inventions, but to also examine his personal traits. By doing so, a much better and clearer picture can be painted of such a scientific icon. He was always known to have certain habits that characterized his personality. Thus, by looking at who he was, one can extend his everyday routines to explain his actions towards scientific inventions. Tesla was known to be impressed and fascinated with nature's occurrences. With that in mind, he appreciated forces unseen to the naked eye. This fascination spread into his work of exploring and understanding forces unknown to the scientific community at that time. Therefore, by studying Tesla's personality, one can not only get a deeper understanding of the man but also a comprehensible explanation to what drove him to become a scientific genius.

Beginning from early childhood, nature played a big role in the development of Tesla's ideas. As a child he liked to watch the birds and to observe their ability to fly. This ignited his imagination and he began pondering on a solution of free flight for humans. He decided to try flying with an open umbrella and he ended up falling sick for six weeks. This was the start of Tesla trying to implement his thoughts into reality. He was known to be curious as a child. He liked to watch the nests of birds and he would roam the high mountains thinking and imagining. Tesla was able to pick up on nature's mighty forces and it was able to catch his curiosity. Once he was in the mountains with his friends and they started rolling a snowball down the mountain. Tesla was fascinated with the snowball's ability to pick up more weight and yet to be able to stick together. It proved to him that there are amazing forces out there that are kept as nature's secrets and that they can be uti-

lized for useful purposes. Another example of this was when he was wandering alone in the mountains and a storm began. Immediately he was impressed by the relationship with lightning and the immediate downpour. He was thirteen and he began to formulate the possibility that if he could create lightning he would be able to always bring water to people and so end all dry spells and there would never be a dry spell on earth again. As a boy he knew no limits to his universe of thinking and this shaped his thoughts as an adult, that he has no limitations to his inventions. Why couldn't he fly like the birds or create lightning? Similarly why couldn't he be able to have an alternating circuit or a robotic ship? He could because from early on he understood the forces of nature and he was able to incorporate those thoughts into his work as an adult.

In addition to his association with nature and the fact that he was the one fascinated with its forces, Tesla was heavily influenced by a living a solitary life. First was the death of his older brother. It brought the child Tesla to believe that he alone must live up to the duties of honoring the family and he began creating this necessity of an image of himself being a larger sphere of life: one for himself and one for his deceased brother. This notion set him aside from others. As a young boy he began to understand things that the other boys didn't and he could not find a companion with his enthusiasm for nature's delights. This caused him to isolate himself from others from a very young age; enabling him to understand that he was destined for other accomplishments in his life, if not great ones. As an adult, he was seen as a loner by most of his peers. When out, he would write on tablecloths or stop conversations in order to return to his thoughts on the inventions he was pondering. His childhood developed his idea of being alone and it manifested later into his relationships with others. He worked best alone and continued to develop his ideas alone as well.

One can see how Tesla continued to live his loner life style by looking at his relationship with women. The only women prominent in his life were his mother and two sisters. He always attributed his abilities as an inventor to his mother and therefore he did

know the value of women. When he was a young man, Tesla was considered very handsome. Yet, he would avoid all romantic endeavors. He would not allow himself to wander into those romantic thoughts and soon he was able to control those feelings. He instead began to idealize women. One incident states that a famous French actress, Sarah Bernhardt, dropped her handkerchief in front of him. He quickly returned it to her but afterwards continued immediately conversing about his experiments that he was currently working on with his male friend. Tesla once spoke about his position of marriage. He explained, " I have planned to devote my whole life to my work and for that reason I am denied the love and companionship of a good woman." He continued to state that due to the fact that he was an inventor, his whole passion went into his work. If he gave himself to a woman, it would lessen this passion for his work. He held women in high regard. Yet, even though he held them at such high remark he refused to share even a small part of himself with any woman. He claimed that women would end up being the superior being due to the fact of their expanding knowledge. At the end, Tesla tried to convince others that he had eliminated all love and romance from his life and in parts he succeeded and in other ways he didn't.

If anything, Tesla loved his work and he also loved a daily habit: feeding the pigeons. For thirty years he practiced this daily excursion. He would often bring a companion to join him for these walks. This further shows his connection to nature. Often it was wondered why a man such as himself would spend two days straight working on his inventions, yet would have time to scatter birdseed. If he were ever unable to go out and feed the pigeons, he would pay a messenger boy to do it for him. He also kept pigeons in his rooms and the window was never closed. Once he became so ill that he had to make sure that the secretary fed his birds in his rooms. At some points he became so delirious that all he spoke about was a certain white pigeon. Some months later, one of his pigeon's fell ill and he did not show up to his lab in order to take care of it. Later when he was completely broke, he only cared to have enough birdseed for his loved pigeons. This was fur-

ther proof of his love for nature. Later it was found out that Tesla had a significant occurrence with a white pigeon that he loved and that had moved him. Tesla was in love with nature, beauty and its forces. This motivated him in his work and thus he was adamant about his walks and the feedings of the birds.

Not only did Tesla have a constant love for walks and feedings of pigeon's; he was also persistent in his eating habits, his attire, and his germ phobia. Tesla was always known to be neat in all of his affairs. He was very careful with his attire and he would declare that he was the best-dressed man on 5th Avenue. He did not have a large wardrobe nor did he wear jewelry. With whatever he wore, it would carry a kind of elegance and confidence. He did not do this in order to be vain. It was more, he felt that the world sees him as what the image he portrays through his clothing. He often would wear the clothing once and instead buy another within in the next week. He would never wear the same gloves for more than a week and would never launder his handkerchiefs. This led to his constant germ phobia. He refused to eat at a table with a used tablecloth. Every plate and silverware had to be sterilized with heat prior to him using it. If a fly landed on his table, he would have a whole new meal prepared for him. When he would wash, it would be at a separate wash room and each time with a new towel. He would go as so far that if a man would shake his hand, he would quickly excuse the man and go and wash his hands immediately. This could have stemmed back from the time of his childhood. Tesla was known to be sick as a child, suffering twice from two serious illnesses. Both of the illnesses manifested through impure water and contact with individuals. Also he was very effected by his older brother's death and thus his germ phobia might have been infested through the death of his brother. His diet also changed as he got older. As a young man, Tesla enjoyed fine thick steak and other meats. Later on he decided on a diet of fish and after awhile he became vegetarian. He did however drink a lot of coffee and he was able to give it up only much later. All of these habits contributed to his everyday life, making him more of an isolated individual and thus aiding him in his inventions.

By looking at his personality and his traits, one gets a different sense of Nikola Tesla. He becomes one that is driven by his work due to his love for nature. His walks and feeding the birds become a huge aspect of his life. He isolates himself by his habits and especially by his treatment of woman companionship. Yet, all of these aid him in becoming the inventor that he was. Through isolation, he devoted his whole life into his work. His habits make him a perfectionist and one of clear thinking. One simply can't just look at the person's achievement without looking at who the man truly was. There is no question that Tesla was a genius of his time, but to truly understand him, one has to understand who he was.

Bibliography

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